

A closer look reveals women's inequality remains

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On the day before International Women's Day, let's survey the social landscape from a perch high up on the Capitol Campus.

A woman recently governed this state for nearly a decade. Women hold a majority on the state Supreme Court. All three Thurston County commissions are women. Women hold four of the eight seats on the Superior Court bench. Dozens more women serve as heads of state agencies, on city councils and as executive directors of important organizations.

At the national level, Janet Yellen chairs the Federal Reserve Board. Europeans recognize Angela Merkel as the region's most powerful leader among a cadre of male counterparts.

From this perspective, we can see enormous progress toward full equality for women in the last 50 years.

But let's look a little closer.

American women still earn, on average, 77 cents for every dollar men earn. For women of color, the gap is even larger. And although the gap is smaller for younger, more educated women, it is a yawning gulf for less educated single moms.

In America, it took a 7-year-old girl to point out to Lego that young women also play with the company's toys, and that its Lego people were promoting gender stereotypes.

Every day in the U.S., three women die at the hands of their husbands or boyfriends. In Thurston County, it's not uncommon for a woman's experience to include some type of abuse, and the number of survivors of domestic violence and rape who seek help and shelter from nonprofits such as SafePlace is growing.

The wielding of domestic power swings more unequally around the world, particularly in nations where rape remains a weapon of war and where girls and women lack fundamental legal and human rights.

The United Nation's Commission on the Status of Women reports that if current rates of marriage continue through 2020, more than 50 million girls under the age of 15 will become child brides.

The struggle for women's rights has always required incredible courage. To win the vote in this country, women chained themselves to the White House fence, were arrested and were brutally force fed when they went on a hunger strike.

Just last year, a young Pakistani, Malala Yousafzai, bravely spoke out for girls' right to an education. Even after the Taliban tried to assassinate her, Yousafzai continues to champion those rights.

The message of International Women's Day remains both relevant and urgent. International development experts have long recognized that educating women and girls is the most effective strategy for reducing population growth and poverty, and for improving health and opportunity for their children.

Women's equality literally saves lives.

We all need to celebrate the progress we've made – and keep working until all women are safe, proud and prosperous.

Read more here: <http://www.theolympian.com/2014/03/07/3020959/a-closer-look-reveals-womens-inequality.html#storylink=cpy>